

**Ambassador Feinstein Remarks to the 23rd International Child Survivors
Conference**

August 22, 2011

Thank you for that introduction. It's a real honor to be here in a room with so many inspiring people. I want to thank Stefanie Seltzer of the World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors and Anna Drabik of the Association of Children of the Holocaust in Poland for their invaluable work in leading these organizations, and especially for bringing this conference to Poland.

Jews have a very long history in Poland. Polish-Jewish relations have been complicated at times, in part because of Poland's location in the so-called "bloodlands," where great power competition too often brought out the worst in humanity. And yet Jews found a home in a historically diverse and tolerant Poland, establishing what was at one time the largest Jewish community in the world. In Poland, Jews were able to express their culture and their religion. They also made vital and lasting contributions to Polish society and world civilization, including in the arts, science, and commerce.

But the unspeakable horror of Nazi invasion and occupation forever changed this thousand-year history of Polish-Jewish coexistence. Despite the brutal occupation by the Nazis, many Poles sought to help their Jewish neighbors, including risking their own lives to save Jewish children. Let us not forget that there are more Poles among the Righteous than any other peoples. Irena Sendler was a Polish hero who saved thousands of Jewish children. But she was only one among thousands of Poles who accepted the responsibility to protect their fellow human beings. These efforts were indeed heroic acts of compassion, but they were also a result of the long history of Poles and Jews living together in peace.

Each of you who survived the Shoah has your own story to tell. Each story is a powerful and inspiring tale of human kindness and bravery in the face of pure evil. I commend all of you for having the courage to share your stories. Each person you tell, particularly among the next generations, becomes an ally in trying to prevent such horrors from happening again. It is all the more heartening to hear how successful you have been in your lives-- raising your own children, finding professional achievement, and helping others. The fact that you survived, let alone accomplished so much, is a testament to what is good and what is admirable in humanity.

In hosting the conference in Poland, you are helping this country to re-discover its heritage and promote the broader story of cooperation between Jews and non-Jews. For there is a real and growing interest among Poles in exploring this history and embracing Jewish culture. The U.S. Embassy in Poland, representing millions of Americans who trace their roots to Poland, is playing an active role in supporting this renewed cooperation between Jews and Poles.

There are annual festivals of Jewish culture in Krakow and other Polish cities. Polish high schools and universities have set up Jewish studies programs. Organizations like the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations and the Foundation for the Protection of Jewish Heritage have sponsored Holocaust education, exchange programs for teachers and students, and renovations of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries. And a Museum of the History of Polish Jews is rising from the ashes of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw to teach future generations about this rich history.

In May, President Barack Obama visited the Memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto and the adjacent construction site of the museum. He also met with a group of Warsaw Ghetto survivors, which was one of the most powerful and emotional events in his program in Warsaw. He told those of us who joined him at the Memorial how moved and inspired he was by this experience.

We must do more, however, than just tell the story of the Holocaust. Unfortunately, this alone has not been enough.

Oppression and even mass murder continue to this day.

President Obama, in his video remarks on the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, called upon survivors to:

“not simply bear witness, but to bear a burden. The burden of seeing our common humanity; of resisting anti-Semitism and ignorance in all its forms; of refusing to become bystanders to evil, whenever and wherever it rears its ugly face.”

As a scholar of law and international relations, I have worked on something called the “responsibility to protect,” which sets a norm for the international community to intervene to prevent crimes against humanity. We drew lessons from the failure of states to prevent the Holocaust. And we drew inspiration from the stories of individuals like Irena Sendler, who not only felt a bond of common humanity, but also found the courage to act upon it.

Today, America is working with valuable partners like Poland to protect innocent civilians in other countries from mass atrocities, repression, and tyranny. Poland can draw upon its multi-cultural history and its peaceful transition to democracy to help other countries resist tyrannical regimes and find dignity for their people.

Much work remains. People around the world are still being persecuted and killed on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. We must therefore find the compassion, the courage, and the resources to help protect them. Hearing stories of children surviving the Holocaust-- and making the most of their lives-- provides inspiration to the rest of us to find this courage. So let me say thank you once more to you survivors, thank you to those of you who saved them, and thank you to the family and friends for helping them share their story. It is a story that Poland needs to hear. It is a story that the world needs to hear.

Thank you.